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AUTHOR	Dandy, Evelyn Baker
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ABSTRACT

The Pathways to Teaching Program is answering Georgia's call for minority teachers by offering noncertified school district employees with exemplary work records, above average college grades, and sincere commitment to teaching, tuition and other support to take college courses and become certified as teachers. In return, scholars contract to maintain a 2.5 grade point average (GPA), attend all program seminars and workshops, and teach in urban schools for at least 3 years. Georgia's Armstrong Atlantic State University is the first in the state in number of minority students enrolled in student teaching. Armstrong and Savannah State University, a traditionally black institution, collaborate to improve public education, with campuses sharing faculty. Armstrong's Pathways to Teaching Program is designed to increase the number of certified teachers, primarily minorities, in local public schools. Its main target is noncertified personnel. Special program features include workshops on improving GPA, mid-term grade reports, and Friday replacements which allow participants to take courses. Armstrong's success in recruiting, retaining, and training minority teachers involves: a credible, committed university advocate; sufficient funding; flexible scheduling; administrative support; collaboration with public schools; and increased practicum requirements in teacher education courses. (Contains 13 bibliographic references.) (SM)

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SELECTING AND PREPARING QUALITY TEACHERS FROM THE PERSONNEL POOL

Submitted by
Evelyn Baker Dandy, Ph.D.
Director, Pathways Initiative

E.B. Dandy

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INTRODUCTION--OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAM

They will be teachers, but to the kids they'll reach, they'll be heroes. They'll give them hope. They'll give them dreams. They'll change their lives. (Haselkorn, D. And Fideler, E., 1996, p. 6)

The DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Pathways to Teaching Program is answering Georgia's call for minority teachers by taking non-certified school district employees who have exemplary work records, better than average college grades, and a sincere commitment to teaching and offering them tuition and other support so they can take college courses and earn degrees leading to teacher certification. In exchange, Scholars contract to maintain a 2.5 grade point average, attend all seminars and workshops offered by the program and teach in urban schools for at least 3 years. The idea is to tap into a talented pool of people who have already shown their commitment to making a difference in students' lives and provide them with financial, educational, and emotional support to surmount the obstacles posed by a family, full time employment, part time employment (in many cases) and a return to college.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

A child in Georgia can go from first grade to twelfth grade and never have a teacher of color. Imagine 12 years of schooling without a teacher who lives in your community, listens to the same music, watches the same television programs, attends the same kind of church service, enjoys the same foods, or aspires to be like the same role models.

Investigators have searched for components of successful programs that would recruit, train and employ minority teachers and summarized their findings by describing what should be in place for the pool of possible workers, what institutions must do to address the need and how teacher education curricula must be changed in order to prepare these teachers. The program described in this article instituted those features found in the literature.

Villegas and others (1995) found four major factors: Commitment to multiculturalism; support services for participating students, financial incentives; and use of cohort groups. Curricula must incorporate increased meaningful experiences in urban schools, stemming from a collaborative relationship with the public schools and a teacher education curriculum that embodies instruction in attitudes, knowledge and skills teachers must have in order to work effectively with children in urban environments.

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According to a report from the Holmes Group (Nicklin, 1995), lack of progress in school reform is partly the fault of the colleges. Fewer than 5% of the school of education professors nationwide have ever taught in an inner city school. Retired school district principals offer a possible source of adjunct professors, because they are familiar with the intricate workings of their schools, and they have been sensitized to contemporary classroom life.

Haberman (1989) suggests that paraprofessionals are viable choices for increasing the number of minority teachers because of their experience in schools. Haselkorn and Fideler (1996, pp. 4-5) report that the nation's nearly 500,000 paraeducators (teacher assistants or teacher aids) hold promise for creating a more diversified workforce. According to their national study, programs such as these carry the following advantages. Paraeducators: (1. bring mature individuals with extensive classroom experience into the profession; (2. have far lower rates of attrition that many traditional teacher education programs; (3. foster high expectations for K-12 students, because they internalize a commitment to doing whatever it takes to help students set high goals and achieve them; (4. strengthen the connection among classrooms, colleges, and communities to make higher education more accessible, more affordable, and more relevant to the demands of contemporary classroom life; and (5. live in, work in and understand the community of their students.

THE PATHWAYS TO TEACHING PROGRAM

The Collaborative Units: AASU, SSU, BOE Although there are 14 state and 18 private post secondary institutions in Georgia that offer degree programs in education, Armstrong Atlantic State University (AASU) is the only one to offer education degrees in the coastal or 10 adjacent interior counties. Growing rapidly on its present 250-acre site in south Savannah, AASU employs 235 full-time faculty, and offers 75 academic programs to over 5,400 graduate and undergraduate students. In 1996 AASU's School of Education was the 7th largest of the 33 state institutions. AASU's graduate have a 97% pass rate on the required Georgia Teacher Certification Test (TCT). AASU is first in the state in the number of minority students enrolled in student teaching, and in 1996 it led the state when the growing number of minority teaching interns was included.

Armstrong and Savannah State University (SSU), a traditionally black institution, have worked together very closely during the past 20 years to improve public education. Instituted in 1991 by agreement with the Board of Regents, the teacher certification program at SSU allows students there to pursue degrees in their chosen content areas and take certain prescribed professional education courses that will allow them to become certified to teach in the public schools of Georgia. The content courses are taught by the SSU faculty, while the professional education courses are taught on the SSU campus by AASU faculty.

In 1992 the Savannah-Chatham County Public Schools (BOE) employed 664 paraprofessionals. Of that number, 440 were minorities with 15 males and 425 females. The 224 nonminorities consisted of 7 males and 217 females. Readiness and commitment could be seen in the proposal accepted by the BOE to release 30-40 paraprofessionals **with pay** one day per week for four years, so that they could complete their educational program at AASU or SSU. The estimated total in-kind contribution of the BOE for this endeavor was $336,000. In 1992 both AASU and SSU received $612,000 in the original grant from DeWitt Wallace - Reader's Digest Fund. Eighty per cent of the grant was designated for scholarships, and the remainder for program costs. An additional $12,000 was awarded for a special account for Scholars to handle childcare, books, travel and other emergencies.

The Pathways to Teaching Program at AASU is one part of a national effort - The Pathways to Teaching Careers Program. The brainchild of Dr. Mildred J. Hudson of the DeWitt Wallace- Reader's Digest Fund, this effort was instrumental in forging the investment of some $40 million for a series of grants that included 66 colleges and universities, located in 47 cities in 28 states. The grant was targeted to produce more than 3,000 teachers, who would serve more than 100,000 students annually--all in an effort to recruit and train teachers, especially minorities, for urban and rural public school systems. Regional technical assistance for program direction was provided by the Southern Education Foundation, that has a 125-year record for promoting equity and equality in education. See the Fall 1998 issue of Urban Education for an evaluation of the national program and additional articles on teacher recruitment by Villegas and Clewell.

Program Mission and Goals The mission of AASU's program is to increase the number of certified teachers, primarily minorities, in Savannah-Chatham County Public Schools. The goals are (1. To produce at least 55 certified elementary and middle school teachers; (2. To enhance the capacity of AASU's teacher preparation program by modifying and expanding the current curriculum; (3. To strengthen and maintain the collaborative effort among AASU, SSU, and the BOE; and (4. To facilitate professional working relationships among faculties.

Program Design The Pathways to Teaching Program employs a program Director, Coordinator and a full-time secretary. The Program Director deals with the day-to-day running of the program. The Program Coordinator aids the Director in developing the curriculum, assumes advisement responsibilities of the Director, assists in the hiring of part-time faculty, and chairs the Program's Advisory Committee, made up of representatives of the College of Education, the College of Arts and Sciences, AASU's Minority Affairs Director, community members and a representative from the BOE. The BOE representative maintains ongoing dialogue with Program Director and acts as liaison to other BOE services and personnel.

Program Eligibility The Program's target population is non-certified personnel: Paraprofessionals, substitute teachers, school clerks and secretaries. Program applicants must be an employee in good standing at the Chatham County Schools; declare education as their major at Armstrong; commit to teaching in inner city schools for a minimum of three years in Chatham County Schools following program completion; and qualify for regular admission at AASU.

The Screening Process Applicants must complete a preliminary application which includes a 200-300 word essay on "Why I Want to Become a Teacher." If AASU faculty readers do not pass the essay, applicants are sent a letter of rejection. If the essay is passed, applicants are sent a letter stating that they should pick up the Secondary Application Packet. The Secondary Application requires the applicants to fill out a form which includes a short written paper describing an educational dilemma they have faced. They submit three detailed recommendations from their supervisor and two teachers with whom they have worked, and they have all transcripts sent to AASU. Once all documents have been received, the Screening/Advisory Committee meets to review their file. If invited for an interview, applicants are required to write an essay and answer questions posed by the committee. The applicants are rated on recommendations, essays, grade point average, grooming, personality, level of commitment and oral reading performance. All decisions of the Committee are final. Applicants who are accepted as Scholars must sign a contract that describes the obligations of the Program and the Scholars. Once all of the final selections have been made and acceptances received, Scholars attend an orientation workshop that gives them a thorough understanding of the project. Support is made available through 80% tuition scholarships, textbook vouchers, flexible scheduling, orientation sessions, tutorials, cultural awareness activities, family support activities, networking, and incentive awards. The Program fosters a family-like atmosphere where Scholars progress through their educational programs in cohort groups.

SPECIAL FEATURES OF THE PROGRAM

1. How to Improve Your GPA Workshops Any Scholars whose grade point average (GPA) was 2.5 or below were identified and required to engage in a series of tasks. Initially all were counseled by the Program Director to determine their immediate goals. The College of Education's Counselor held a mandatory four-hour workshop entitled "How to Raise Your GPA". Each Scholar met individually with the Counselor and outlined a plan of action. Scholars' grades were recorded and monitored for three consecutive semesters. Two Scholars in that group are now eligible for the 100% tuition HOPE Scholarship given to Georgia students who maintain at least a 3.0 GPA. After one year, Scholars who failed to improve their GPA were placed on probation and given two more semesters to improve. Those whose GPA continued to suffer were asked to leave the Program. Thus far, eleven (11) Scholars have been dismissed from the Program due to low grades.

2. Mid-term Grade Reports On all mid-terms rolls Scholars are designated with the letter I. Two weeks prior to mid-term, faculty who have Scholars in their courses are sent a brochure and fact sheet describing the Program. They are requested to submit the mid-term grade to the Program Director, who discusses progress, reinforces study habits and locates a tutor, if necessary, for any Scholar who receives a C or below. The Scholar is directed to meet with the instructor, thus opening dialogue between them. Only in rare cases are courses dropped at mid-term.

3. Friday Replacements This is a unique win-win arrangement for Scholars, teachers with whom they are placed, school principals, and AASU senior level education majors. Notices area sent to qualified majors, who sign an agreement to replace Scholars every Friday during the quarter and earn $25.00 per week. Scholars, released with full pay, are responsible for orienting their replacements, seeing that they sign in at the school and follow through with work plans. The University offers two three credit classes, usually taught by retired principals, every Friday during the semester. Principals are pleased with this arrangement because their most valuable paraprofessionals are replaced at no cost to the school, and they have an opportunity to observe potential student teachers. Education majors have an opportunity to "get their foot in the door", engage in authentic classroom experiences, and earn up to $100 per month. This arrangement allows some Scholars to take a full load of courses and eliminates the need for child care as Scholars take evening courses. This effort was subsidized by interest earned from the initial grant award.

Awards, Honors and Accomplishments Sixteen Scholars have won their school's nomination for Sallie Mae First Year Teacher of the Year. One has won the Billy Ward Scholarship presented by the National Association for Alternative Certification and Educational Preparation. Scholars have presented the program at local, state and national professional conferences (such as AACTE, NEA and Recruiting New teachers). AASU's Pathways Program has been cited as one of the "Five Best Practices for Retention" in the University System of Georgia and awarded exemplary program status. The Program was featured in NEA's School Stories a 30-minute documentary aired on The Learning Channel. The program also has been featured on local, state and national television, radio and newspapers.

Lessons Learned The University's administration continues to recognize that institutions can recruit, retain/train and graduate minority students when they cultivate the resiliency already inherent in students, who survive the screening process. However, several support systems must be in place: 1. A credible, committed university advocate who can empathize with the Scholars, and is accessible and aware of the resources that will help the students; 2. Monies for scholarship, books, tutoring and emergencies that are bound to occur when the targeted population embarks on college completion. 3. Flexible scheduling that provides for the Scholars who are juggling numerous other responsibilities: part-time employment, care of elderly parents, and etc. Classes must be offered at night as well as on the weekends. 4. Administrative support from the President, Vice President, Dean, Department Head and Faculty. A message is sent to all faculty and support services that this Program is a priority. When this occurs, the institution rallies around the Program to provide essential services. 5. Close collaboration with public school personnel who work together to recruit, select and place graduates. 6. Increased practicum requirements in teacher-education courses - The real world of schools has changed since most university faculty have received their preparation. Faculty are sensitized to the needs of this new population and adjust their curriculum accordingly. Newly retired principals and other administrators offer a wealth of knowledge and experiences and sometimes serve as adjunct faculty and mentors for these Scholars.

DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE PROGRAM Out of 1000 inquiries and applicants, one hundred eight (108) Scholars have been selected for the program. Of that number fifty-five (55) are pursuing bachelor's degree programs and fifty-three (53) are pursuing teacher certification. As of Spring, 2000, sixty-two (62) Scholars have completed the program. Of the graduates 53 are employed in local public schools. These teachers have a 96% retention rate that clearly exceeds national figures.

EMPLOYMENT LEVELS FOR GRADUATES

GRADUATES	Elementary	Middle	High School	Totals (%)
Black Male	9	6	2	17 **(28%)**
Black Female	27	11	1	39**(62%)**
White Male	1	1	0	2 **(3%)**
White Female	3	1	0	4 **(7%)**
Total	**40**	**19**	**3**	62 **(100%)**

Grade Summaries: The mean GPA of Scholars attending Fall, 2000 was 2.98
48% of the graduates have an overall GPA of 3.0 or higher.

GRADE REPORT SUMMARY

SUMMER 1993- SPRING 2000	A	B	C	D	F	W	S	TOTAL
No. Of Scholars Receiving Grade	473	669	272	105	55	88	83	1745
% of Scholars Receiving Grade	27.1	38.3	15.6	6.0	3.2	5.0	4.8	100%

PROGRAM REPLICATION

In a three-round competition with 1540 applicants, the Pathways Program won the 1997 Innovations in American Government Award that provided monies for replication and dissemination. This funding subsidized two national Scholars conferences, established a website, and enabled several Scholars to accompany the Program Director and present the model at numerous professional conferences.

During Fall, 1999 the Program received a three year grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Teacher Quality Initiative to replicate its efforts in three neighboring rural counties. These school systems have demonstrated an even more serious need for minority teachers. The goal of this effort is to produce 50 new minority teachers. The programs authorized under the Higher Education Act were designed after the Pathways to Teaching Careers Program. According to U.S. Secretary Riley, "What we learned from the Pathways to Teaching model is that these support services play an absolutely critical role in helping students to complete their programs and begin successful teaching careers" (1998, p. 27).

Strategically screened non-certified school district personnel can and do make quality teachers, if they are provided with financial, emotional and intellectual support from participating universities and school districts. These teachers are heroes, changing the lives of their students while they answer Georgia's call for minority teachers.

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